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Centralisatie en decentralisatie bij de Nederlandse politie. Over actuele aansturing en resultaatverantwoordelijkheid bij de Nederlandse politie

Treur, Jannetje Hendrika Francina

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SUMMARY

1. Introduction: subject and problem definition

This study deals with the subject of distribution and re-distribution of actual¹⁾ steering and adjusting activities among single basic police units on the one hand and steering and adjusting levels or centers in their (inter)organizational environments on the other. I wanted to know if indeed such a "re-distribution" could be observed, and if this would bring the Dutch police on the way towards a more "modular organization". By this I mean a large-scale (and so by definition at least centralized on main lines) organization, composed out of relatively autonomous but result-responsible units ("modules"), which are (within a global policy framework) predominantly controlled by means of management-contracts and work-evaluations based on relevant monitor-information.

2. Theory

The tendency towards more global central control and more autonomy of (sub) units does not only exist in private enterprises, but also in public administration and public organizations. In the sixties and seventies the aim was mainly to motivate the organizational units and their members, and to increase the involvement of the work teams at the base of the large organizations (Kastelein, 1990 and 1993). One hoped to improve their productivity and satisfaction by giving them better feedback and thereby reducing their alienation from the common endeavour. This "participation motive" was reinforced by the cultural wave of democratization and self-estimation, which later on ebbed away rather quickly (Kastelein, 1990). In the eighties another motive became prominent, namely that of the controllability of the organization as a whole in combination with "the fine tuning" of the various front units to their specific environments.

Five formal-rational arguments for centralization and central control can be distinguished:

- an external "more general" or "higher" interest, imposed from the outside on the units concerned;
- a demand for equal rights, existing outside and/or within the units concerned ("equal strikes for equal folks");
- the combining of means, power or influence ("stronger together");
- economy of scale ("cheaper by the dozen");
- the desirability of standardization, uniformization or compatibility (derived from one or more of the motives mentioned above).

The question of whether, to which extent and in what way there really should be any central control, should be answered by weighting on the one side the required material and moral constraints and costs against the values gained on the other. In doing this, five categories of factors restricting the effectiveness of central steering, regulation and support of peripheral units should be taken into consideration:

- the scale of the field upon which central control is or should be exercised (number and size of the units concerned);
- the diversity of the units concerned (differences in number and size of the units concerned);
- the dynamics in the fields concerned (variation-range and variability of the variables to be controlled);
- the interdependencies within the fields concerned (mutual dependence of the variables to be controlled);
- the assertivity of the groups and/or persons within these units.

The stronger one or more of these factors arise, the higher the costs of central control probably will be, and the more the likelihood of both a control-echec for the central organs and of alienating groups and persons subordinated to this central control. These considerations are important since a large part of the internal affairs of (sub)units mostly are externally determined by many aspect-oriented centers. Thus the actual material control structure is different from the simple, formal hierarchical one. This way of control is called: "multi-central aspect specification (MCA)". In MCA environments the internal processes (the "throughputs") of the smaller units are not only specified by the traditional line-officials but also by a manifold of external specialized aspect-controlling, -coordinating, -supporting and supplying centres. Not recognizing this kind of (functional) control structures is supposed to be one of the main causes of the failure of many decentralization and autonomization projects.

A different means of control is both conceivable and feasible: one in which central steering and regulation is limited to some strategic mainlines and the above indicated aspect-oriented steering, regulation and support of the (sub)units by external centers is replaced by input-output steering and regulation, based upon self-management, contracts and (semi)market relationships between the units (the above mentioned centers being transformed into client-oriented service-providers).

A necessary provision for this system is dedicated monitor systems: the units need reliable and timely information, relevant to their steering and regulation needs. These "dashboards" also have another function, namely as information source for the external accounts concerning the contracts.

Another kind of provision is the possibility of "arbitration" in case of conflicts about the contracts. In some cases this system also requires provisions for "certification" of those external interests where some insight into the "black box" of the "autonomous module" is unavoidable.

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Such an alternative organizational system is called: "contractual multi-organization" (CMO). All existing control structures in empiric reality can be positioned on a line between both these extreme ideal types MCA-CMO.

There are several requirements for a successful transformation from MCA to CMO. As already indicated: one of the failure factors is that the multi-central aspect specifying character of the initial situation is not recognized. Each "aspect specifying" center stands for a particular interest and will not be discharged by the simple decision to decentralize.

Another failure factor is the lack of awareness concerning the structural and instrumental provisions that are minimally required for the desired situation to really work. To realize the required provisions such as contracts, monitor systems, arbitration and certification, some qualitative and quantitative expertise is needed.

Last but not least there are two other failure factors, both in the field of motivation. There is often an unspoken "zero-sum assumption" at all levels of organization: the distribution of influence can be changed, but the total amount of influence exercised in the (inter)organization, as a whole, remains the same. However, the net-yield of an extensive MCA-network is very low and, in principle, the total amount of effective influence in a CMO-situation will increase: a "win-win assumption". The "zero-sum assumption" does not motivate and in many cases works as an inhibition or an impediment to the desired change (Kastelein, 1990).

The transformation from MCA into CMO depends greatly on the motivation of the members of the organization. On the central level, this motivation is mostly derived from the awareness and recognition of the "control-echec" of the MCA-practice and the frustrations caused by it.

On the lower decentral levels, motivation can be derived from a resistance to the alienation, stemming from the MCA-system, and the resulting demand for more involvement and autonomy. Both kinds of motives complete each other. To summarize the necessary motivation-conditions ("process conditions"):

1. a predominant part of the members of the organization must recognize the MCA- character of the existing situation (instead of simply thinking in terms of "centralization");
2. a predominant part of the members of the organization must have an awareness of the CMO-provisions that are required to make the desired situation really work (instead of only thinking in terms of a simple hierarchical "decentralization" as a solution);
3. a certain extra (instrumental as well as change process) expertise for realizing these particular provisions (monitor systems, contracting, certification and arbitration) should be available;
4. on the central levels as well as at the base of the inter-organization there must be a decisive:

- doubt on the zero-sum assumption: no a priori exclusion of a win-win outcome;
- motivation for change, stemming from the above indicated sources.

Once a CMO-organization is started, it requires the material implementation of the provisions ("system-conditions") meant under 2 (above):

1. suitable management- and support-contracts;
2. dedicated monitor-systems;
3. provisions for arbitration and sometimes for certification;
4. significant interest for the units involved to at least fulfil the contracts and to increase their performance;
5. absence of frequent line-interventions;
6. absence of forced trade with support centers;
7. provisions for performance-incentives, absence of "punishment" in the form of budget-cutting for successful units.

Main hypotheses derived from this theory are:

1. A specific fit between a unit's system and its contingencies (qualitative and quantitative workload, resources and constraints) will be connected with predominantly positive judgements of internal and external stakeholders about the effectiveness of this sub unit;
2. (Sub)units within "multi-central aspect specifying (inter)organizations" will have more difficulties in finding and establishing their optimal fit, regarding their particular internal and external contingencies, than "result-responsible units" within "contractual multi-organizations". These result-responsible units will more easily find their optimal fit.
3. (Sub)units within "multi-central aspect specifying interorganizations" will gain less positive judgements about their effectiveness than units within "contractual multi-organizations".
4. A successful change along the MCA-CMO line requires the presence of the motivation as well as the (instrumental, structural) system-conditions which are summarized above.

3. Research

My field research was carried out in the period 1990-1996, aiming at empirical indications -and if possible evidence- that the phenomena described in this theory occurred in the Dutch police. The following stages can be distinguished:

- Three orienting investigations, in order to select a number of units that were probably significantly contrasting in respect to "autonomy" (there already had taken place, spread over the country, some decentralization/autonomization programs):
 - 15 interviews with chief commissioners of municipal police forces and 8 interviews with district commanders of the state police;
 - a written inquiry in municipal and state police forces;

- a connected interview program.
- Four comparative case-studies (extensive management and organization audits by means of a standardized program): two in municipal units, two in state police units.
- Participant observations, connected interviews and document studies in the steering committees of three police forces, charged with the task to initiate and steer organizational reform projects.
- Participant observations, interviews and document studies in the project organization that designed a new regional police force, as a merger of a number of municipal forces and state police units.
- Inquiry, interview program and document study concerning a decentralization program in a newly formed regional police force.
- Updating of earlier acquired material by interviews, document studies and participant observations.

A complication during the course of the field research was that within one or two years from the beginning the developments concerning organization and control of the Dutch police came quite rapidly into operation. The 148 municipal police forces and 17 state police districts merged into 25 regional forces and 1 national supporting force.

As a result the original research design, aimed at a transversal comparison of a rather large number of units, more or less contrasting with respect to their position on the autonomy-dimension had to be left for a more dynamic, process observing approach.

As a consequence the original hypotheses-testing ambition was replaced by a more humble, explorative and plausibility-seeking attitude.

4. Main conclusions

Concerning the question whether or not in the Dutch police units can be observed in different positions (and in movements between these positions) between MCA- and CMO-environments, my conclusions can be summarized as follows:

Before "the great national police-merging process" (mentioned in former paragraph) there has already occurred here and there more or less fundamental decentralization-projects, but in the first two research stages actual empirical changes could not yet be observed. During the following research stages, focussed on the reform processes and on the organization re-design and implementation programs, it became however evident that indeed significant and effective material progress was made in fitting up the new regional forces, according to the theoretically required provisions to let them function on the basis of contractual steering and result-responsibility. There are strong indications that a considerable transfer of steering and adjusting functions now really is going down to the shop-floor and that this process will not stop somewhere in between top and base (which so often happens, as Burger, 1992, observed).

Concerning the question if there are empirical indications that units which show the theoretically foreseen characteristics of "result-responsible units in a CMO-environment" really show:

- a. a better fit to their work-load and their working-conditions, and
 - b. a higher degree of effectiveness
- than those that are more similar to "dependent units in an MCA-environment", I have come to the following conclusions:

1. As already mentioned, in the intended comparison at the beginning of my investigations (stage 1 and 2) empiric variations (contrast) with respect to "autonomy" hardly did exist. So this question could not be answered (and even if the contrast would have been there, the number of cases ($n = 4$) would have been too small).
2. During the later stages of the research the so called "process-conditions", required for a significant move from MCA towards CMO, generally turned out to be fulfilled).

Implementing the so called "system conditions" was explicitly part of the aims of the mentioned organization reform and re-design projects and programs, which I investigated in the stages 3 and further. As far as my observations reach (in 5 regional forces, in a time span in which not all the projects reached their deadlines and effects could not yet be evaluated), I have to conclude that in this respect a considerable progress is made in the direction of a "modular organization". More and more "management contracting" and "result accounting", based upon suited monitor provisions (the now so called "five-plus instrumentary") are becoming normal practice. The policy-decision is now to implement within a couple of years this instrumentary in all the Dutch forces.

Although we undoubtedly have to conclude that there are significant changes in the Dutch police on the MCA-CMO dimension, I am unable to answer the question concerning the theoretically crucial role and contribution of the "process-" and "system-conditions", because I was unable to systematically compare situations (or processes) in which these conditions were not and in which these conditions were indeed fulfilled.

So summarizing I conclude that in the Dutch police the "modular organization", as mentioned in paragraph 2, is indeed progressing. But I have no evidence that units, operating under the new conditions are more effective than those under the former regime. It is however my opinion, beyond the scientific bearing surface but shared by many a police official, that they actually are more effective.

NOTE

¹⁾ I.e. empirically perceptible, instead of formally designed.